Ages and stages of development

Since each child develops in their own particular manner, it is impossible to tell exactly when or how they will achieve a given skill. These developmental milestones will give only a general idea of the changes you can expect as a child gets older. Do not be alarmed if their development takes a slightly different course. The important thing to be aware of is a steady progression of gaining skills.

Developmental milestones 3–4 years (Nursery)

Movement

- Balances on one foot for 2–3 seconds.
- Jumps on the spot with two feet together.
- Runs easily, able to stop to avoid a collision.
- Able to run and kick a stationary ball.
- Kicks ball with direction.
- Demonstrates good posture when sitting or standing (at a desk/table, on a chair, in line).
- Able to jump up approximately 30 cm in the air.
- Able to jump along approximately 30 cm.
- Able to jump down approximately 30 cm.
- Attempts to hop, may manage two or three on dominant foot.
- Walks up and down stairs, alternating feet.
- Runs in a coordinated way.
- Stands on tiptoes and walks 3 m.
- Balances and walks on a 10 cm wide beam.
- Walks heel to toe along a line a short distance.
- Able to walk and run backwards with agility.
- Pedals tricycle.
- Bends over easily without falling.
- Catches a large ball from 1.5 m, possibly against body.
- Throws a small ball overhand in correct direction.
- Climbs well on and off furniture/toddler gym equipment.
Hand and finger skills
- Hand preference usually obvious.
- Forms letters, numbers, and basic shapes that are accurate and legible.
- Picks up small objects with a pincer grip.
- Threads beads.
- Builds a tower of more than six blocks or copies three steps with six cubes.
- Draws a person with one or two body parts.
- Makes vertical, horizontal and circular strokes with pencil or crayon.
- Holds a pencil in writing position (may not use correct grip).
- Screws and unscrews jar lids, nuts and bolts.
- Turns rotating handles.

Language
- Understands positional relationships (on, in, under, up, down, front, back).
- Follows a two or three component command.
- Recognises and identifies almost all common objects and pictures.
- Understands most sentences.
- Uses four and five word sentences.
- Can say name, age and sex.
- Uses pronouns (I, you, me, we, they) and some plurals (cars, dogs, cats).
- Strangers can understand most words.

Cognitive
- Shows and repeats words for hands, feet, nose, eyes, mouth, shoes.
- Makes mechanical toys work.
- Matches an object in her hand or room to a picture in a book.
- Plays make-believe with dolls, animals and people.
- Sorts objects by shape and colour.
- Completes puzzles with three or four pieces.
- Understands concept of ‘two’.

Social
- Imitates adults and playmates.
- Spontaneously shows affection for familiar playmates.
- Can take turns in games.
- Understands concept of ‘mine’ and ‘his/hers’.

Emotional
- Expresses affection openly.
- Expresses a wide range of emotions.
- By three years old, separates easily from parents.
- Objects to major changes in routine.

Concerns should arise if a child continues to experience the following:
- Frequent falling and difficulty with stairs.
- Persistent drooling or very unclear speech.
- Inability to build a tower of more than four blocks.
- Difficulty manipulating small objects.
- Inability to copy a circle by age three.
- Inability to communicate in short phrases.
- No involvement in ‘pretend’ play.
- Failure to understand simple instructions.
- Little interest in other children.
- Extreme difficulty separating from mother.

**Developmental milestones 4–5 years (Reception)**

**Movement**
- Uses playground/gym equipment (climbing frame with ladder slide, low balance beams, swings—may not be able to initiate the swing) independently.
- Jumps over/across low objects in play environment (blocks, low hurdles, ropes, etc.).
- Stands on one foot for five seconds or more.
- ‘Gallops’ along 4–5 metres.
- Hops on one foot for five or more times.
- Skips along on alternate feet four or more times.
- Runs around obstacles and turns corners with agility. Goes upstairs and downstairs without support and with one foot to each step.
- Kicks ball forward with good aim.
- Throws ball overhand with accuracy.
- Bounces and catches a football to self.
- Catches bounced ball most of the time with hands only—does not need to use a body grasp.
- Moves forwards, backwards and sideways with agility.
- Walks along a line heel to toe and backwards six or more steps.
- Walks sideways on a 10 cm beam without stepping off.

**Hand and finger skills**
- Copies square.
- Draws a person with two to four body parts, includes head, legs, trunk and usually arms and fingers.
- Holds instrument with proper tension and grasp (scissors, pencils, pen, paintbrush).
- Turns book pages one at a time.
- Hands out individual sheets from a stack of paper.
- Uses scissors.
- Draws circles and other simple shapes independently.
- Begins to copy some capital letters.
- Attempts to do buttons and other fastenings on self or dolls.
- Able to unscrew and screw up objects.
Language
- Understands the concepts of ‘same’ and ‘different’.
- Has mastered some basic rules of grammar.
- Speaks in sentences of five to six words.
- Speaks clearly enough for strangers to understand.
- Tells stories.

Cognitive
- Correctly names some colours.
- Understands the concept of counting and may know a few numbers.
- Approaches problems from a single point of view.
- Begins to have a clearer sense of time.
- Follows three-part commands.
- Recalls parts of a story.
- Understands the concept of same/different.
- Engages in fantasy play.

Social
- Puts on and takes off articles of clothing independently (shirt, sweater, socks).
- Shows ability in personal hygiene (wash hands, brush/comb hair).
- Interested in new experiences.
- Cooperates with other children.
- Plays ‘mum’ or ‘dad’.
- Increasingly inventive in fantasy play.
- Negotiates solutions to conflicts.
- More independent.

Emotional
- Imagines that many unfamiliar images may be ‘monsters’.
- Views self as a whole person involving body, mind and feelings.
- Often cannot distinguish between fantasy and reality.

Concerns should arise if a child continues to show the following:
- Cannot throw a ball overhand.
- Cannot jump in place.
- Cannot ride a tricycle.
- Cannot grasp a crayon between thumb and fingers.
- Has difficulty scribbling.
- Cannot stack four blocks.
- Still clings or cries whenever her parents leave her.
- Shows no interest in interactive games.
- Ignores other children.
- Does not respond to people outside the family.
- Does not engage in fantasy play.
- Resists dressing, sleeping, using the toilet.
- Lashes out without any self-control when angry or upset.
- Cannot copy a circle.
Does not use sentences of more than three words.
Does not use ‘me’ and ‘you’ appropriately.

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**Developmental milestones 5–6 years (Year 1)**

**Movement**
- Stands on one foot for ten seconds.
- Skips along for 4–5 metres.
- Walks around classroom/school avoiding collision with stationary objects/people.
- Carries objects around classroom/school avoiding collision with stationary objects/people.
- Hops on either leg 5–10 times or more.
- Swings and climbs with agility.
- Able to ride bicycle without stabilisers (girls can be a little slower to achieve).
- Dribbles a ball.
- Kicks a rolling ball with accuracy.
- Bounces and catches a tennis size ball.
- Throws a ball with accuracy.
- Able to skip with a rope (boys can be a little slower to achieve).

**Hand and finger skills**
- Cut/draw/trace with accuracy and precision.
- Uses blocks, beads, puzzle pieces to complete appropriate tasks.
- Copies triangle and other geometric patterns.
- Colours neatly.
- Draws person with body.
- Prints some letters.
- Dresses and undresses without assistance.
- Uses fork, spoon and (sometimes) a table knife.

**Language**
- Recalls part of a story.
- Speaks sentences of more than five words.
- Uses future tense.
- Tells longer stories.
- Says name and address.

**Cognitive milestones**
- Knows there is a right and left side to their body (not able to consistently name correctly).
- Can count ten or more objects.
- Correctly names at least four colours.
- Better understanding of the concept of time.
- Knows about things used every day in the home (money, food, appliances).
Social
- Wants to please friends.
- Wants to be like friends.
- More likely to agree to rules.
- Likes to sing, dance and act.
- Shows more independence and may even visit a next-door neighbour by herself.
- Usually cares for own toilet needs.

Emotional milestones
- Aware of sexuality.
- Able to distinguish fantasy from reality.
- Sometimes demanding, sometimes eagerly cooperative.

Concerns should arise if a child continues to show the following:
- Exhibits extremely fearful or timid behaviour.
- Exhibits extremely aggressive behaviour.
- Is unable to separate from parents without major protest.
- Is easily distracted and unable to concentrate on any single activity for more than five minutes.
- Shows little interest in playing with other children.
- Refuses to respond to people in general, or responds only superficially.
- Rarely uses fantasy or imitation in play.
- Seems unhappy or sad much of the time.
- Does not engage in a variety of activities.
- Avoids or seems aloof with other children and adults.
- Does not express a wide range of emotions.
- Has trouble eating, sleeping or using the toilet.
- Cannot differentiate between fantasy and reality.
- Seems unusually passive.
- Cannot understand two-part commands using prepositions (‘Put the cup on the table’; ‘Get the ball under the couch’).
- Cannot correctly give her first and last name.
- Does not talk about her daily activities and experiences.
- Cannot build a tower of 6–8 blocks.
- Seems uncomfortable holding a crayon.
- Has trouble taking off clothing.
- Cannot brush her teeth efficiently.
- Cannot wash and dry her hands.

Developmental milestones 6–7 years (Year 2)

By this age children should have acquired most of their developmental milestones.
- Basic motor skills acquired; improvement in speed and skill of tasks should be observed.
- Able to use ball skills whilst running at speed and changing direction.
- Accuracy with aim and throw whilst on the move.
- Able to coordinate bat and ball activities.
- Skills can be incorporated into team games.
- Able to copy a diamond or rectangle.
- Able to tie a bow or do shoe laces. Mastering a tie usually takes a few more years.
- Emotionally confident and independent of adult.

Children are not expected to be consistent with identifying right and left until eight years.


References